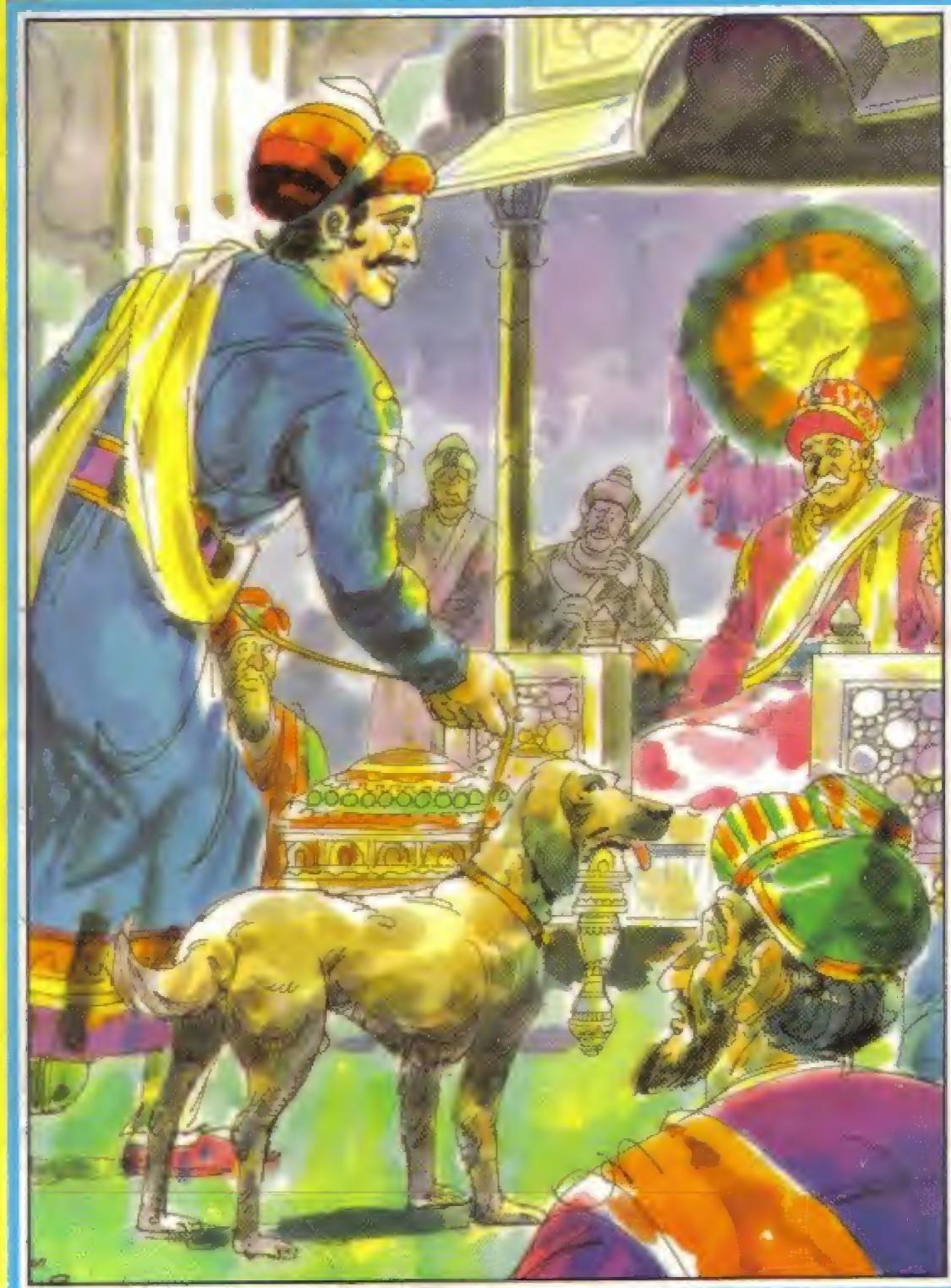


The Inimitable Birbal



PANDIT GANGARAM

BIRBAL HAD GAINED THE REPUTATION OF BEING A SKILFUL SOLVER OF PROBLEMS. ONE DAY, A BRAHMIN CALLED GANGARAM CAME TO HIM.

BIRBAL SAHIB,
I HAVE
A PROBLEM
WHICH ONLY YOU
CAN SOLVE.

WHAT
IS
IT?

I AM A BRAHMIN BY BIRTH. MY FOREFATHERS WERE GREAT SANSKRIT SCHOLARS. EVERYONE CALLED THEM PANDITS.

YES,
I REMEMBER
YOUR FATHER.

I HAVE NEITHER MUCH LEARNING NOR WEALTH.

DO YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU GET WORK?

NO, I AM CONTENTED WITH MY LIFE. BUT I HAVE JUST ONE WISH. I WANT PEOPLE TO ADDRESS ME AS PANDIT.

IS THAT ALL? YOU ONLY WANT TO BE CALLED PANDIT?

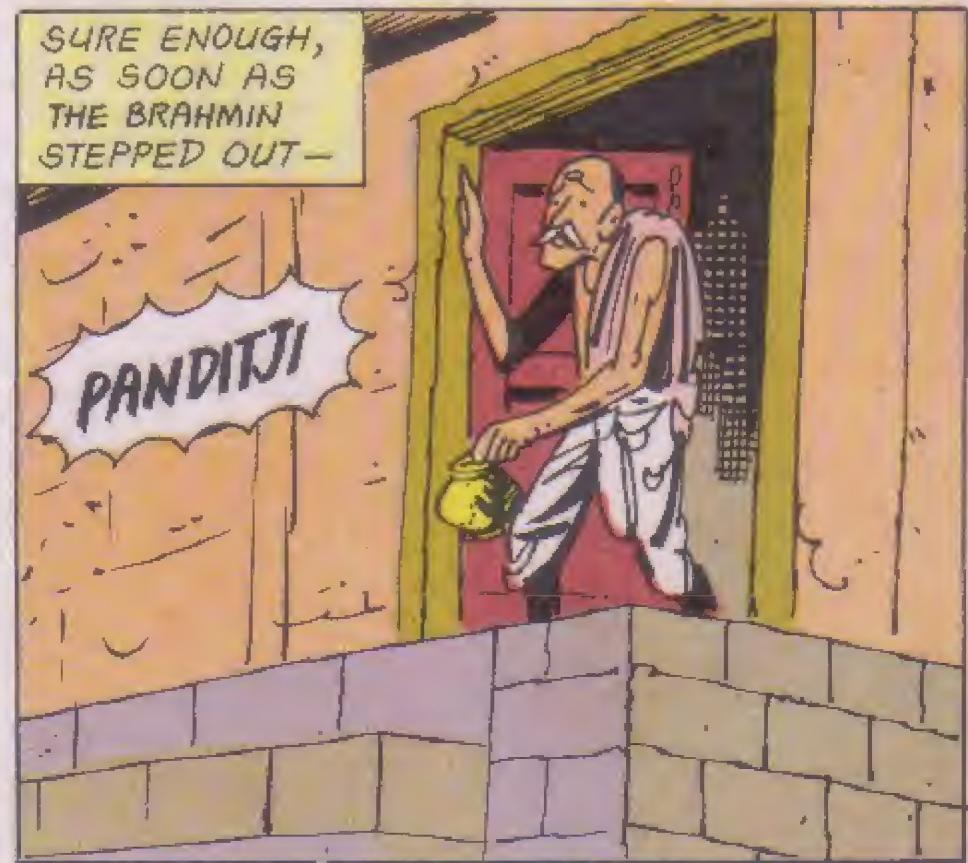
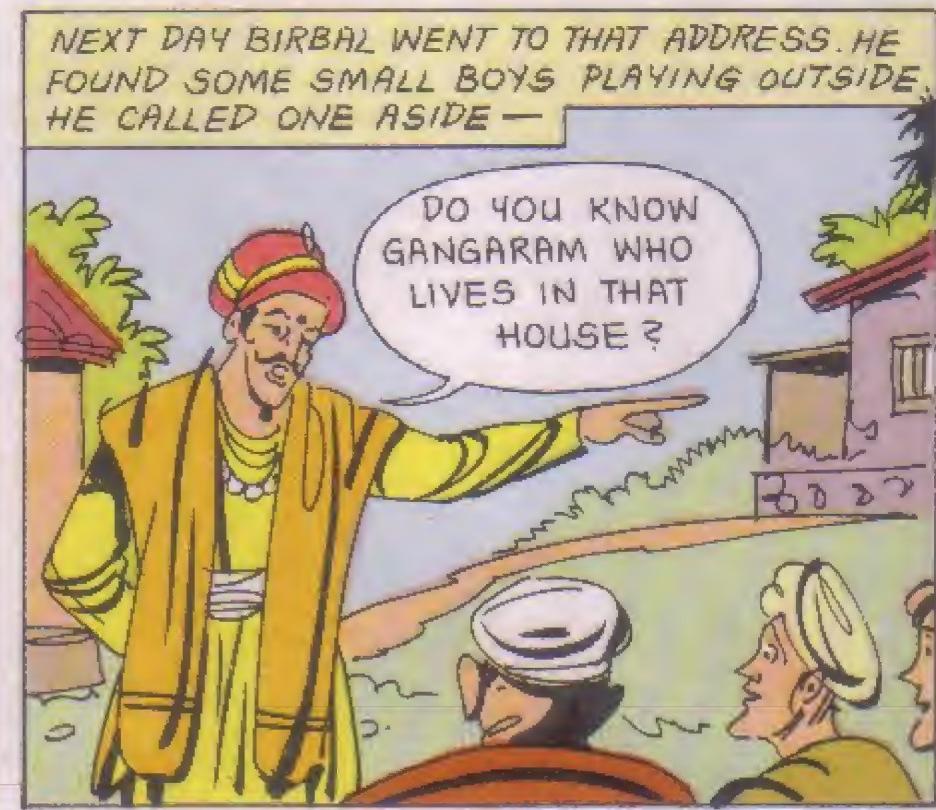
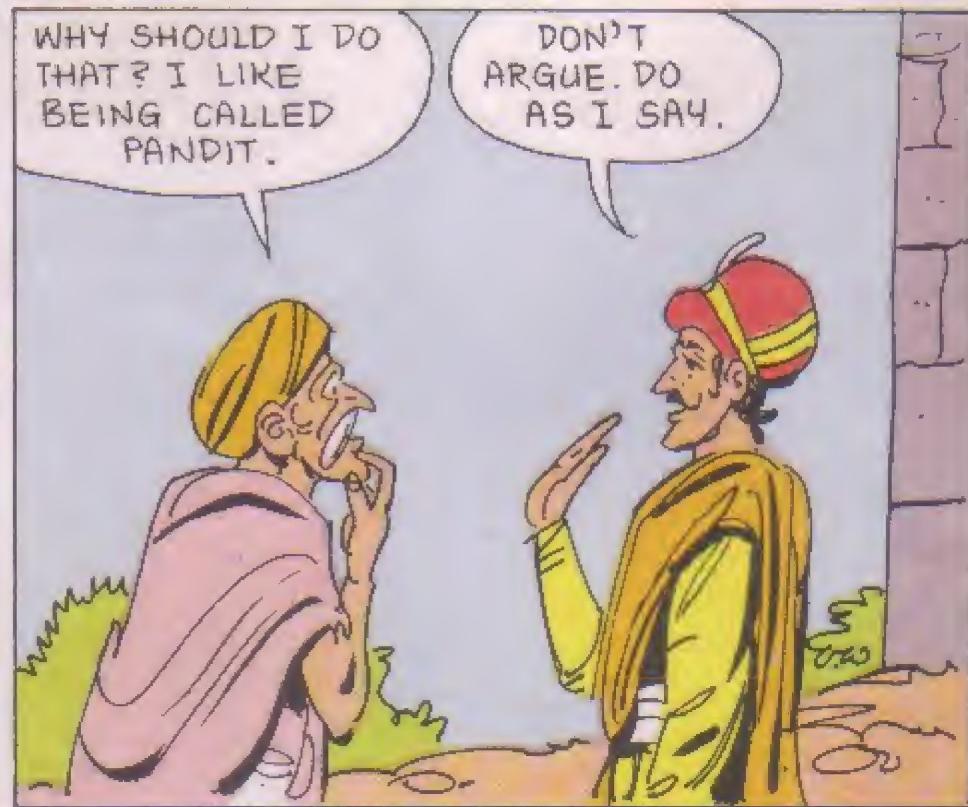
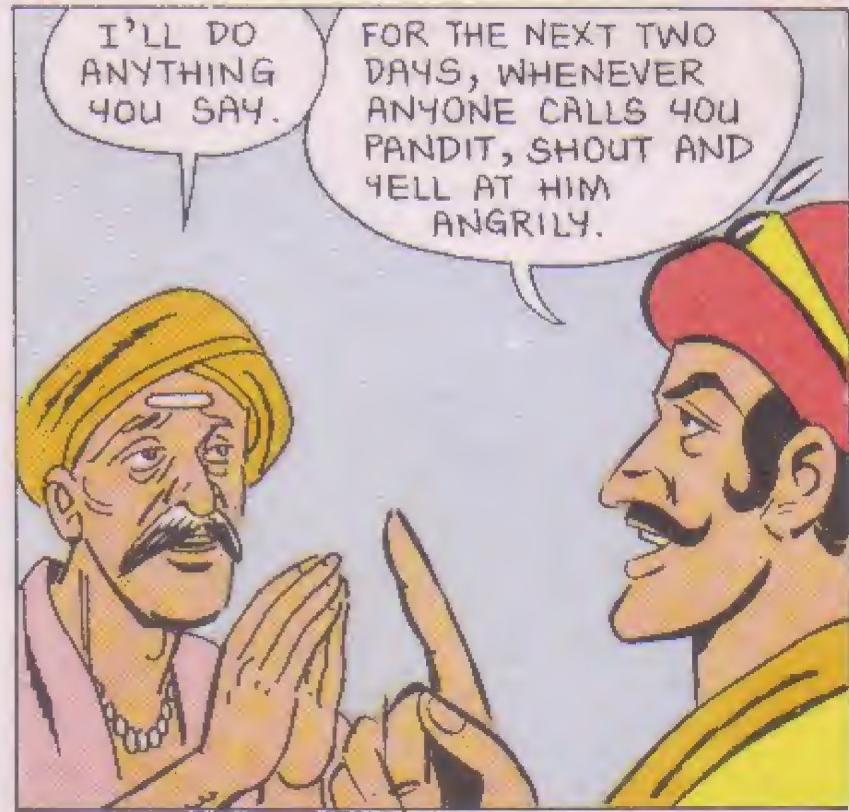
YES, I KNOW IT IS DIFFICULT. BUT NO TASK IS DIFFICULT FOR YOU.

I CAN DO IT IN JUST TWO DAYS.

YOU MEAN EVERYONE WILL BEGIN TO CALL ME PANDIT IN JUST TWO DAYS?

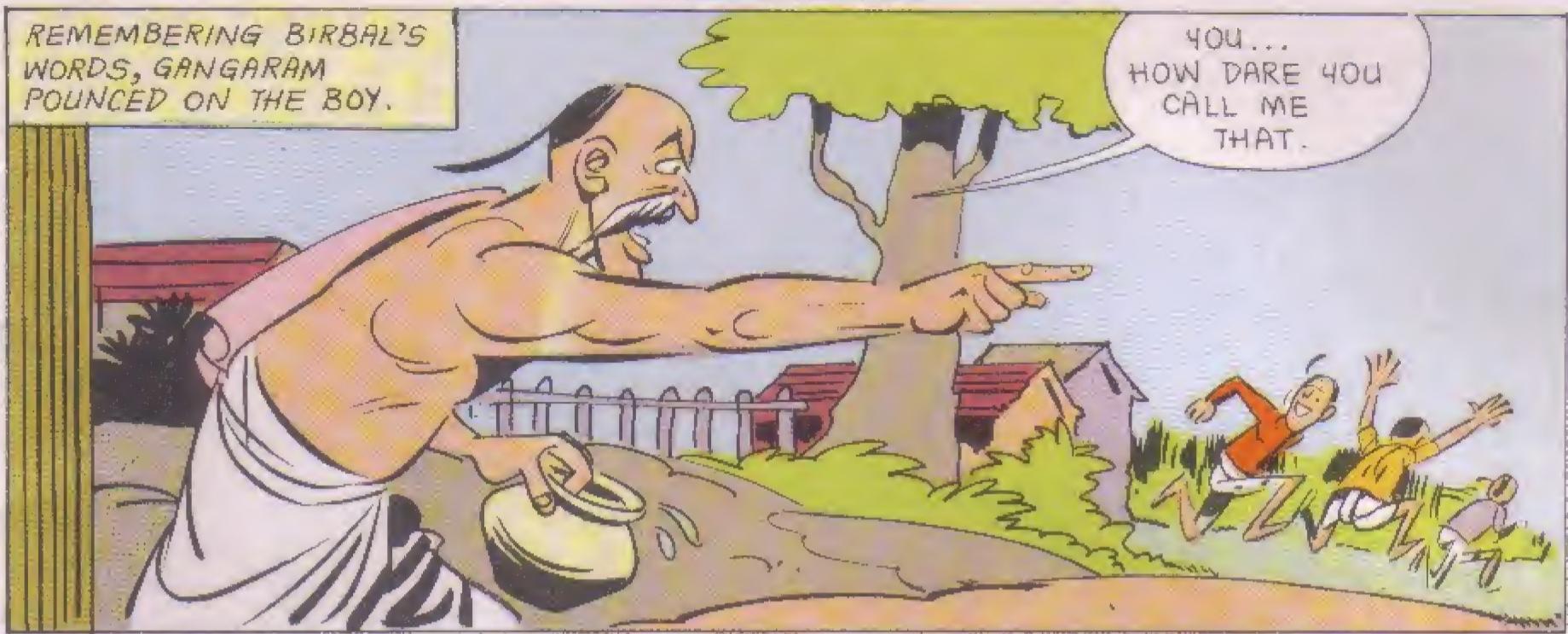
WELL, MAYBE THREE. BUT YOU MUST FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS.





REMEMBERING BIRBAL'S WORDS, GANGARAM POUNCED ON THE BOY.

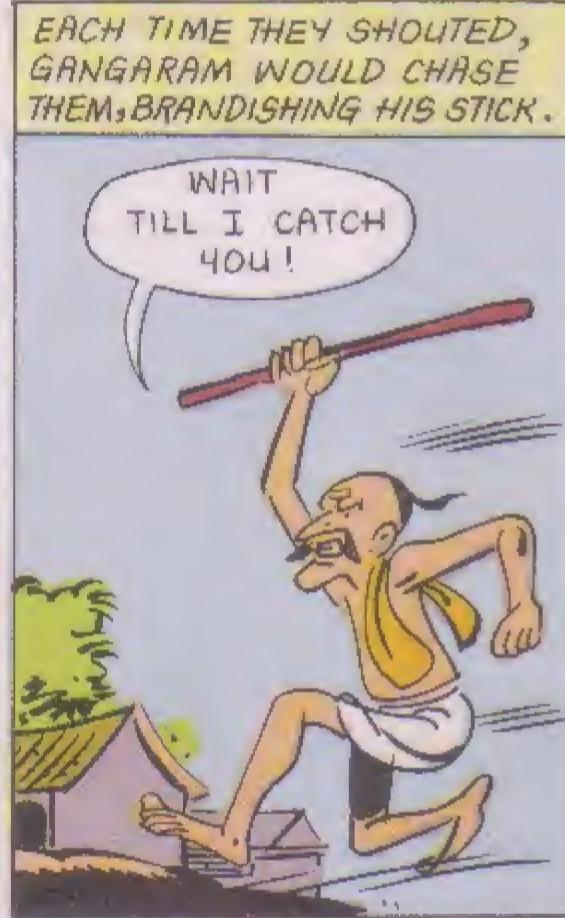
YOU...
HOW DARE YOU
CALL ME
THAT.



NOW THE OTHER BOYS TOOK UP THE CUE.

EACH TIME THEY SHOUTED,
GANGARAM WOULD CHASE THEM, BRANDISHING HIS STICK.

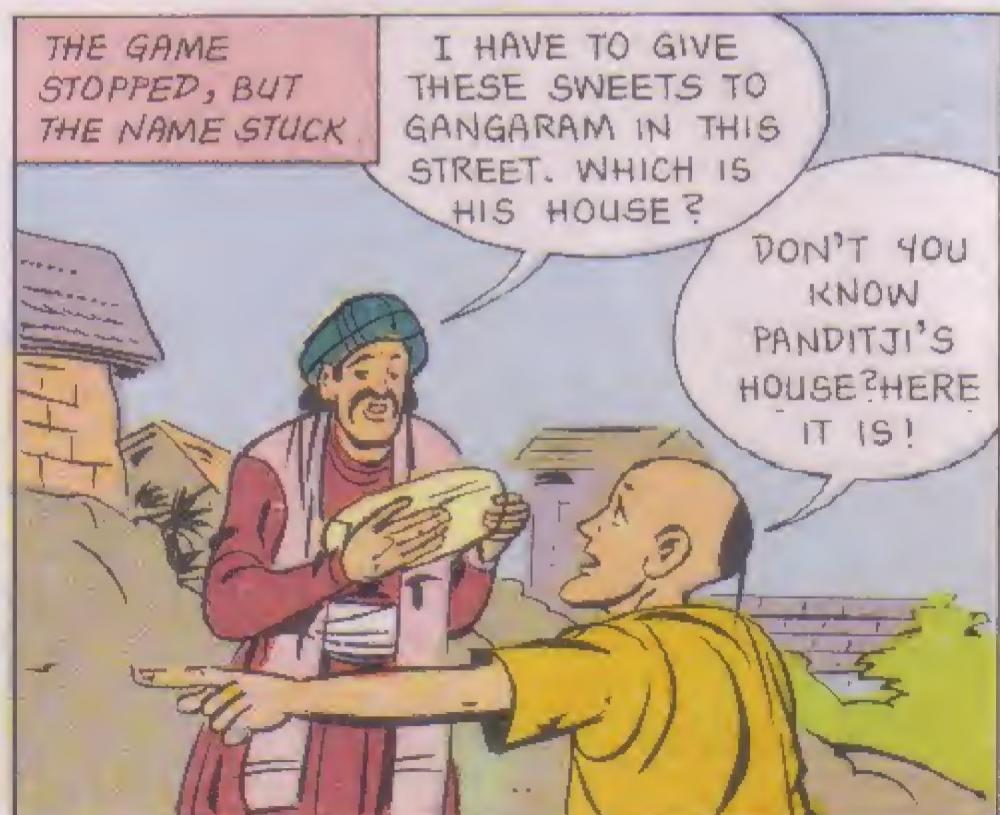
IT BECAME A POPULAR PASTIME IN BARA CHOWK.



SOON, HOWEVER, THEY TIRED OF THE GAME BECAUSE GANGARAM STOPPED ABUSING THEM.

THE GAME STOPPED, BUT THE NAME STUCK.

I HAVE TO GIVE THESE SWEETS TO GANGARAM IN THIS STREET. WHICH IS HIS HOUSE?



AND CURRY OF COURSE

ONE DAY AKBAR CALLED FOR BIRBAL.

BIRBAL, YOU HAD BEEN TO A WEDDING YESTERDAY.

WHAT DID YOU EAT, BIRBAL?

OH! I HAD LADDUS, PHIRNI, PULAO, HMM...

WHAT ELSE?

LET ME TRY TO REMEMBER. YES, THERE WAS KHEER AS WELL AS BIRYANI.

WHAT ELSE, BIRBAL?

OH, THERE WERE SO MANY THINGS LIKE...

JUST THEN, A COURTIER INTERRUPTED WITH AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR THE EMPEROR, AND THE CONVERSATION REMAINED UNFINISHED. NEXT DAY IN THE DURBAR, AKBAR WANTED TO TEST BIRBAL'S MEMORY. HE TURNED TO HIM -

BIRBAL REALISED THAT AKBAR WAS REFERRING TO THE CONVERSATION OF THE PREVIOUS DAY. PROMPTLY HE SAID -

WHAT ELSE, BIRBAL?

AND CURRY, OF COURSE.

AKBAR WAS IMMENSELY PLEASED.

WAH! BIRBAL.
YOU ARE INDEED GREAT. HERE!
TAKE THIS PEARL NECKLACE.

THE COURTiers PRESENT WERE PERPLEXED.

WHY, THE KING MUST REALLY BE FOND OF CURRY. HE GAVE BIRBAL A PRESENT JUST FOR MENTIONING THE WORD CURRY.

AFTER THE COURT HAD DISPERSED, THEY GOT TOGETHER FOR DISCUSSIONS.

WE MUST BRING THE BEST CURRY FOR THE EMPEROR TOMORROW.

YES, LOTS OF IT.

SURELY HE WILL REWARD US TOO.

THE NEXT DAY THEY ARRIVED IN THE DURBAR WITH THEIR SERVANTS CARRYING HUGE URNS OF CURRY ON THEIR HEADS.

WHAT'S ALL THIS? WHAT ARE THESE MEN CARRYING TO THE COURT?

AKBAR UNDERSTOOD AT ONCE—

YOU FOOLS! WHAT BIRBAL SAID YESTERDAY WAS IN ANOTHER CONTEXT. AS A PUNISHMENT FOR YOUR STUPIDITY I WILL MAKE YOU EAT ALL THIS CURRY JUST NOW.

FORGIVE US!
WE WILL NOT ACT IN HASTE NEXT TIME.

WE HAVE BROUGHT CURRY FOR YOU, JAHANPANAH. WE KNOW NOW HOW MUCH YOU LIKE IT.

BIRBAL HAD A GOOD LAUGH.

THE ONLY ROOSTER

AKBAR LOVED TO PLAY HARMLESS TRICKS ON BIRBAL.

SO MANY TIMES HAVE I TRIED TO TRAP HIM, BUT HE ALWAYS GETS THE BETTER OF ME.

THIS TIME I WILL GET EVEN WITH HIM.

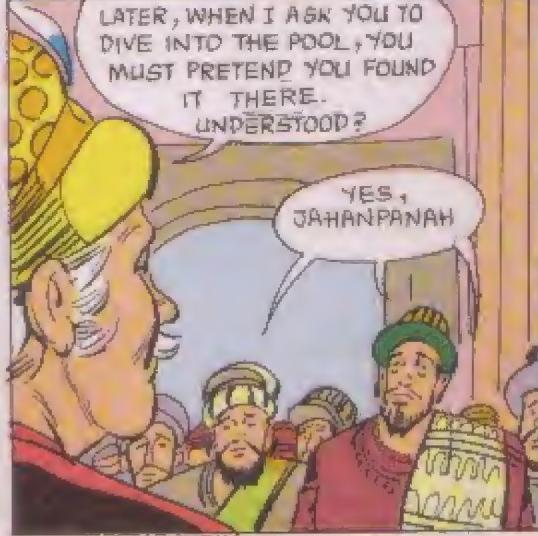


THE NEXT DAY AT THE COURT, HE SENT BIRBAL ON AN ERRAND. ADDRESSING THE REST OF THE COURTIERS, AKBAR SAID —

HERE IS A BASKET OF EGGS. I WANT EACH ONE OF YOU TO TAKE AN EGG AND KEEP IT HIDDEN.

LATER, WHEN I ASK YOU TO DIVE INTO THE POOL, YOU MUST PRETEND YOU FOUND IT THERE. UNDERSTOOD?

YES, JAHANPNAH.



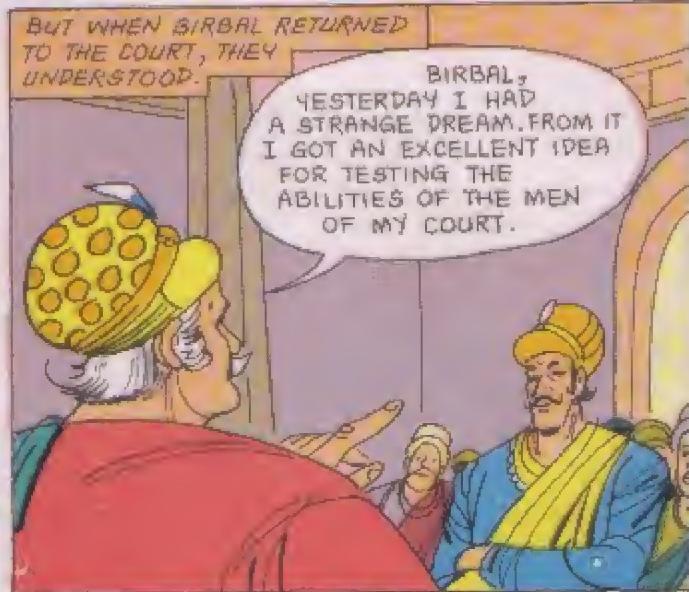
QUEER IDEAS HIS MAJESTY HAS.

BETTER HUMOUR HIM AND DO AS HE SAYS.

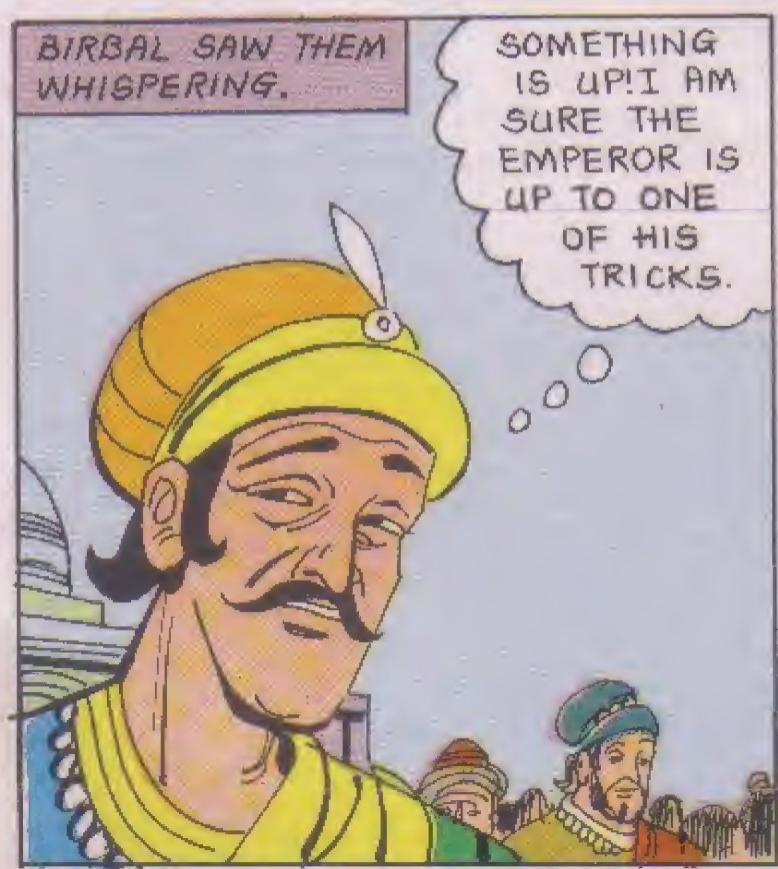
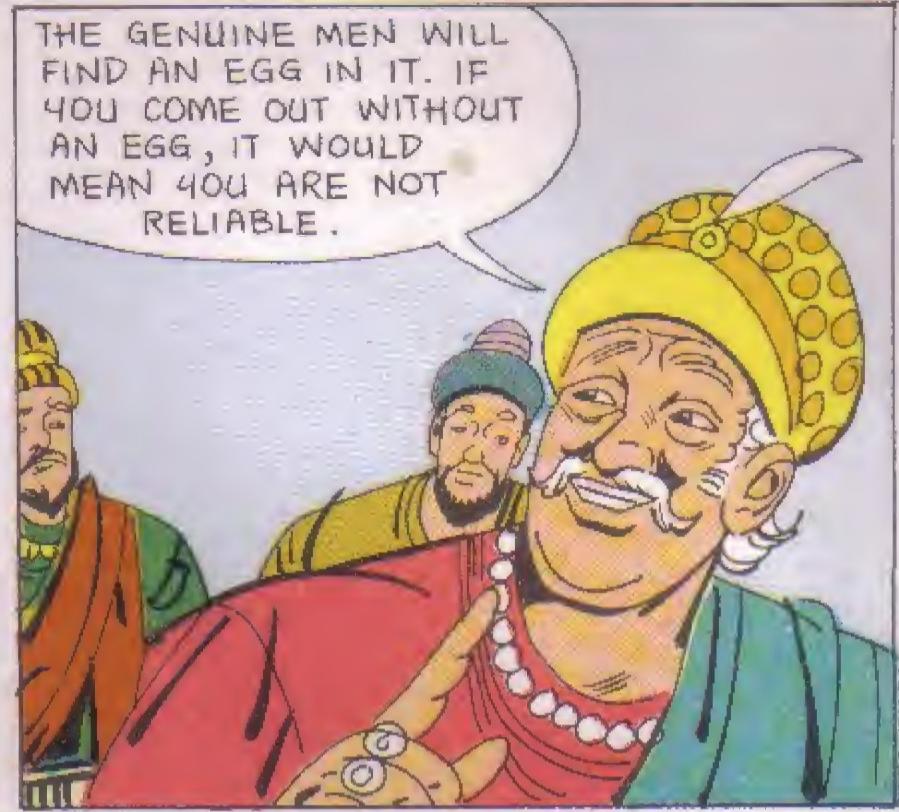
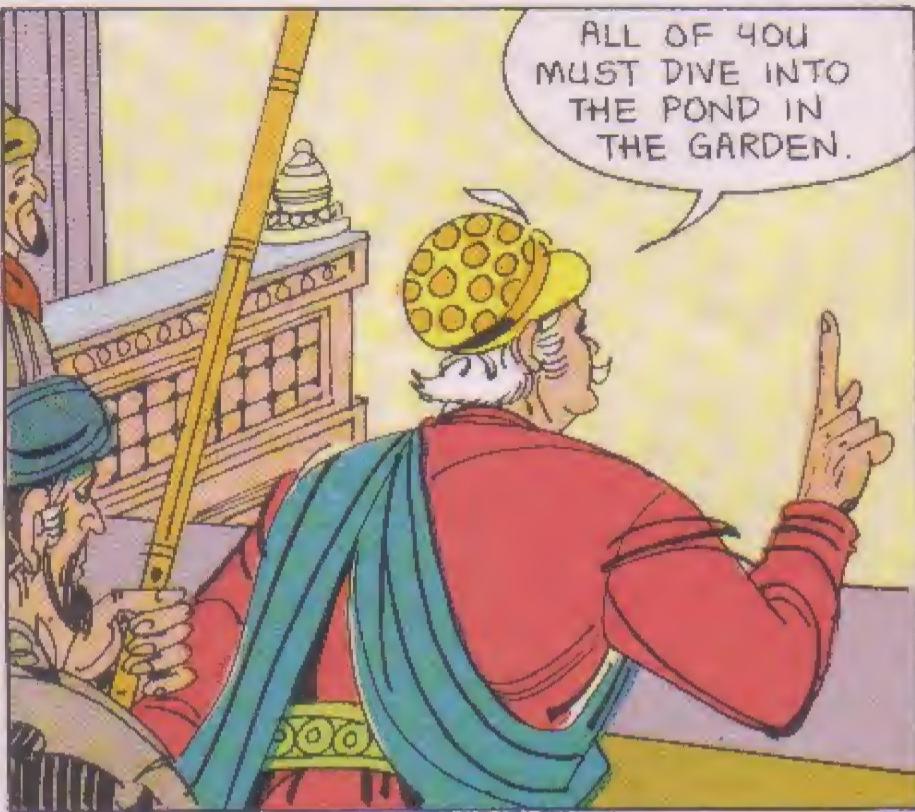
MUST BE A NEW GAME HE HAS THOUGHT OF.

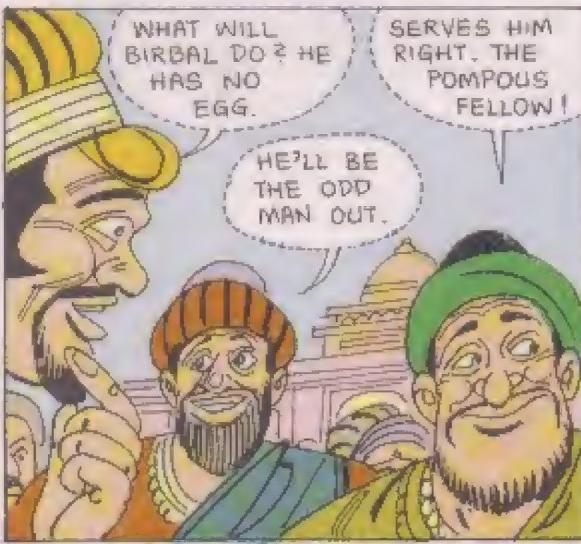
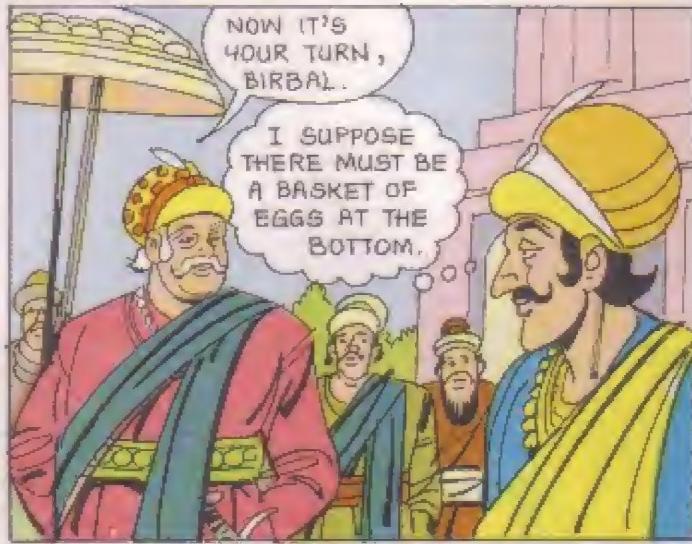
BUT WHEN BIRBAL RETURNED TO THE COURT, THEY UNDERSTOOD.

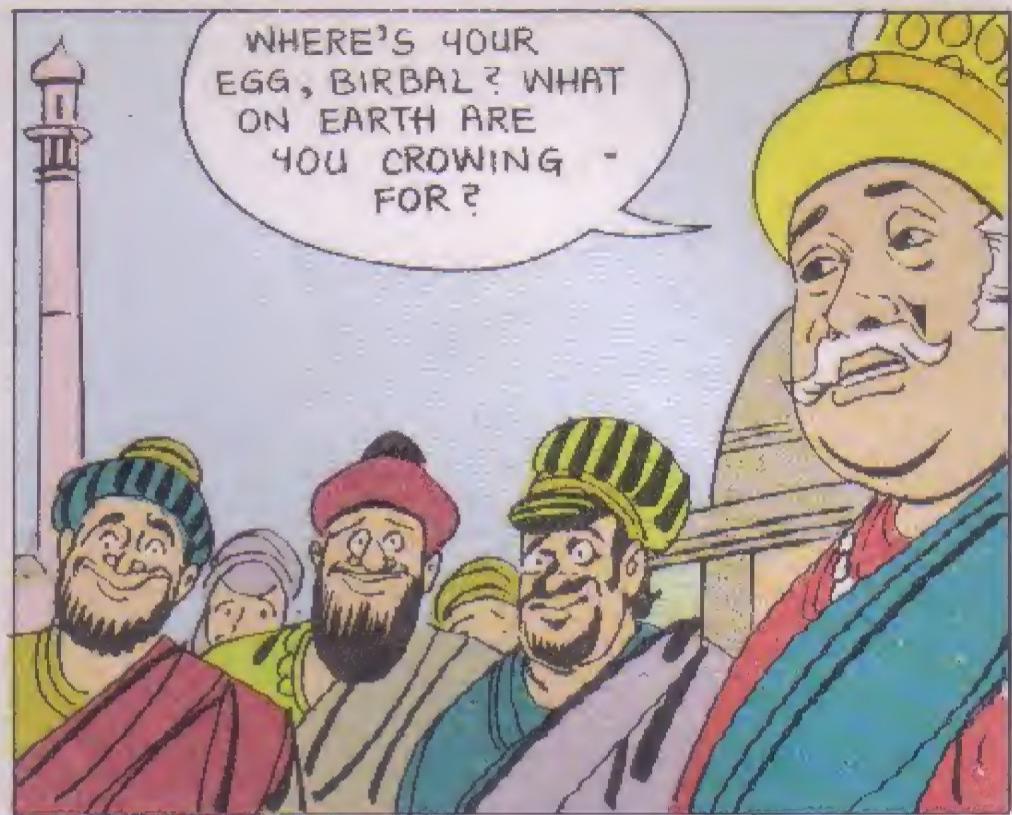
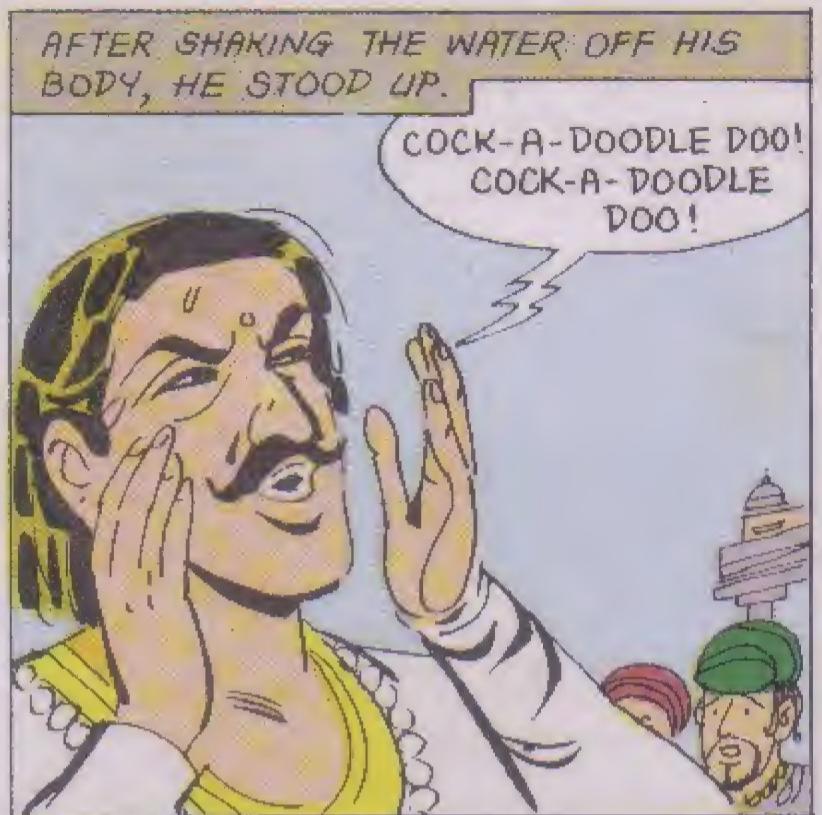
BIRBAL, YESTERDAY I HAD A STRANGE DREAM. FROM IT I GOT AN EXCELLENT IDEA FOR TESTING THE ABILITIES OF THE MEN OF MY COURT.



THE INIMITABLE BIRBAL.







PARTING OF FRIENDS

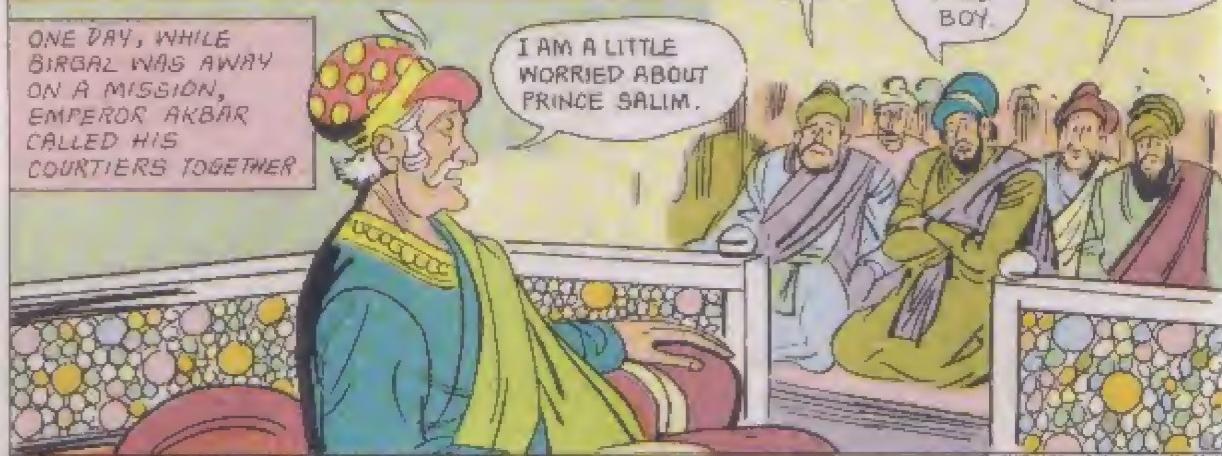
ONE DAY, WHILE BIRBAL WAS AWAY ON A MISSION, EMPEROR AKBAR CALLED HIS COURTIERS TOGETHER

I AM A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT PRINCE SALIM.

WHY HUZOOR?

HE'S A FINE BOY.

AND SO HANDSOME TOO.



AKBAR INTERRUPTED —

YES, I KNOW HE IS A GOOD BOY, BUT OF LATE, HE HAS FALLEN INTO BAD COMPANY.

OH, YOU MEAN THAT BOY, YASIN?

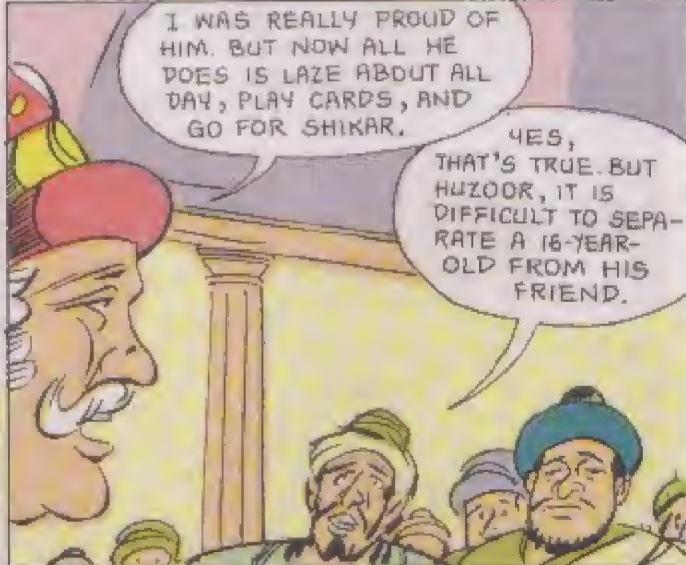
YES, THAT FELLOW IS NO GOOD.



SALIM HAD LEARNED THE ROYAL DUTIES SO WELL.

I WAS REALLY PROUD OF HIM. BUT NOW ALL HE DOES IS LAZE ABOUT ALL DAY, PLAY CARDS, AND GO FOR SHIKAR.

YES, THAT'S TRUE. BUT HUZOOR, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE A 16-YEAR-OLD FROM HIS FRIEND.



THAT IS WHY I AM CONSULTING YOU. AFTER ALL, AS THE PRINCE, HIS FUTURE IS YOUR CONCERN TOO.

WE WILL TRY TO FIND A WAY.

BUT A WHOLE MONTH PASSED. NO ONE COULD THINK OF A PLAN TO CORRECT THE PRINCE.

HUZOOR, SEND YASIN AWAY TO ANOTHER PLACE.

NO, THAT WILL ONLY TURN SALIM AGAINST ME.

WHY NOT TELL SALIM WHAT YOU THINK OF YASIN?

NO, MIRZA, THAT MIGHT MAKE SALIM MORE FOND OF HIM.

WHEN BIRBAL RETURNED FROM HIS TRAVELS, AKBAR TURNED TO HIM FOR HELP.

YOU WANT TO SEPARATE THE TWO YOUNG MEN. WHY, GIVE ME JUST TWO DAYS.

NEXT DAY, AT COURT, BIRBAL CALLED YASIN —

BZZZZ!

ALOUD HE SAID —

NOW, DON'T BREATHE A WORD OF THIS TO ANYONE.

BIRBAL MUST BE GOING CRAZY. HE JUST SAID, "JUST ONE SEED IN EVERY MANGO!"

AS SOON AS THE COURT DISPERSED, SALIM RUSHED TO MEET YASIN.

WHAT WAS IT? WHAT SECRET DID BIRBAL TELL YOU?

NOTHING. HE JUST WHISPERED SOME NONSENSE.



SALIM WAS NOT CONVINCED.

HE COULDN'T HAVE CALLED YOU IN THE DURBAR JUST TO WHISPER NONSENSE.

IT'S TRUE. EVEN I CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT.



BUT SURELY HE MUST HAVE SAID SOMETHING.

ALL RIGHT. IF YOU INSIST. ALL HE SAID WAS "JUST ONE SEED IN EVERY MANGO!"



YOU ARE HIDING SOMETHING FROM ME, YASIN. I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND.

OF COURSE I AM. I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH.

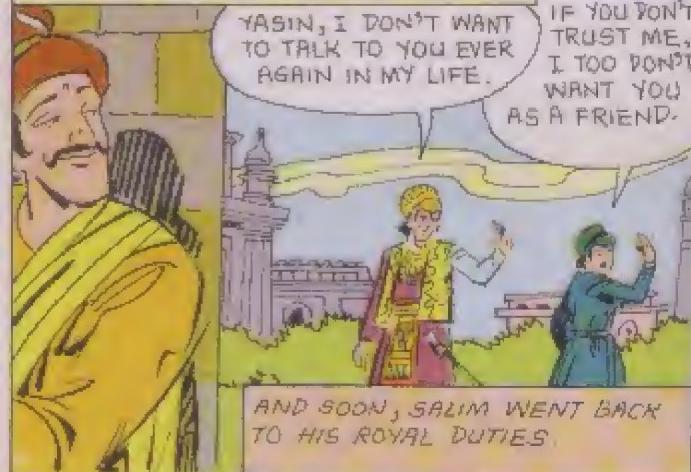


I DON'T BELIEVE YOU, YASIN.

BUT IT IS TRUE. HE SAID JUST THAT. MAYBE HE'S GOING CRAZY.



BUT BIRBAL, WHO WAS SECRETLY OVERHEARING THE CONVERSATION, WAS FAR FROM CRAZY.



YASIN, I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU EVER AGAIN IN MY LIFE.

IF YOU DON'T TRUST ME, I TOO DON'T WANT YOU AS A FRIEND.

AND SOON, SALIM WENT BACK TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES.

THE PHASES OF THE MOON

ONCE AKBAR SENT BIRBAL TO KABUL ON A SECRET ROYAL MISSION.



BIRBAL TRIED TO MINGLE WITH THE LOCAL CROWD, BUT—

I SUSPECT THAT MAN! HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE AN ORDINARY PERSON.

YES, THOUGH HE POSES TO BE ONE OF US, HE IS OBVIOUSLY AN OUTSIDER.



THE KING ORDERED THE SUSPECTED SPY TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE HIM.

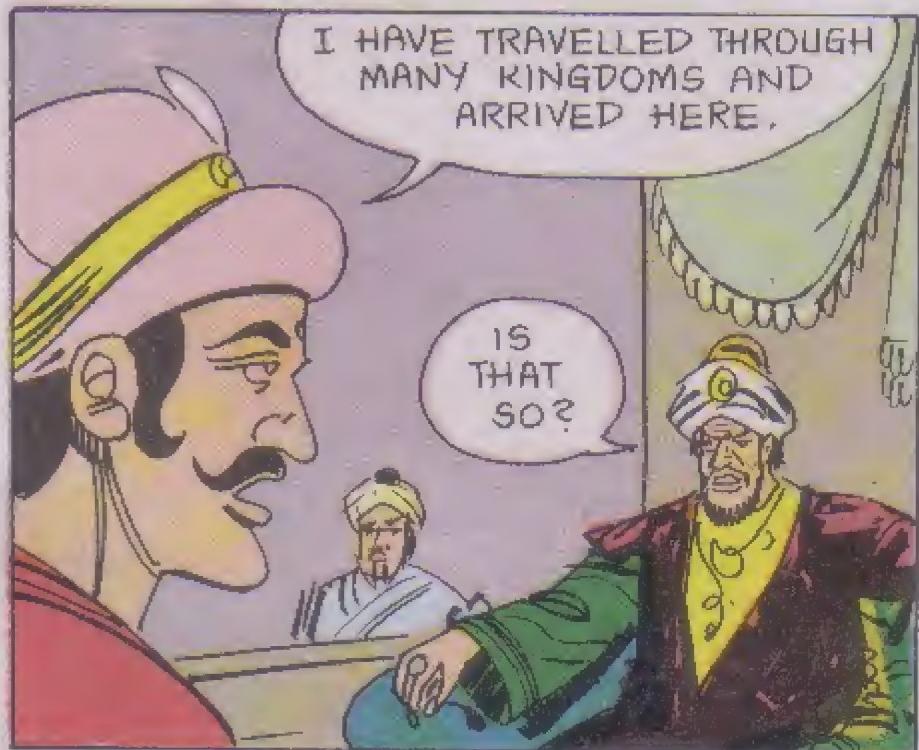


TELL ME TRULY. WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU HERE?

I AM JUST A TRAVELLER.

I HAVE TRAVELED THROUGH MANY KINGDOMS AND ARRIVED HERE.

WELL, SINCE YOU HAVE TRAVELED SO MUCH AND SEEN SO MUCH OF THE WORLD, TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY RULE?

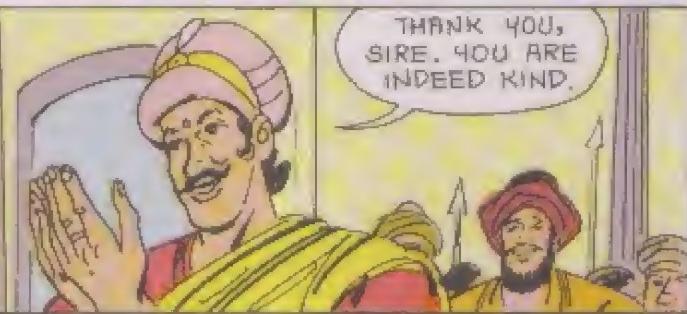
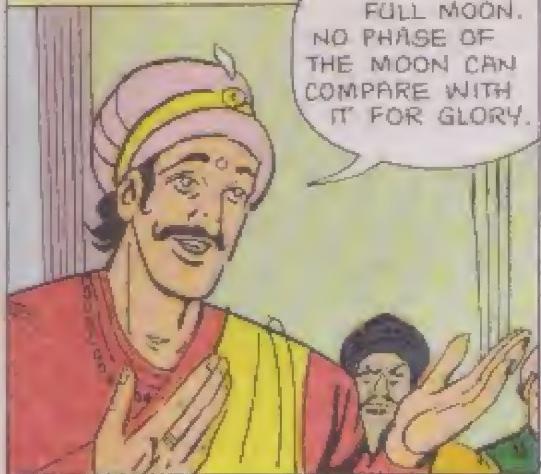


BIRBAL PAUSED
TO THINK —

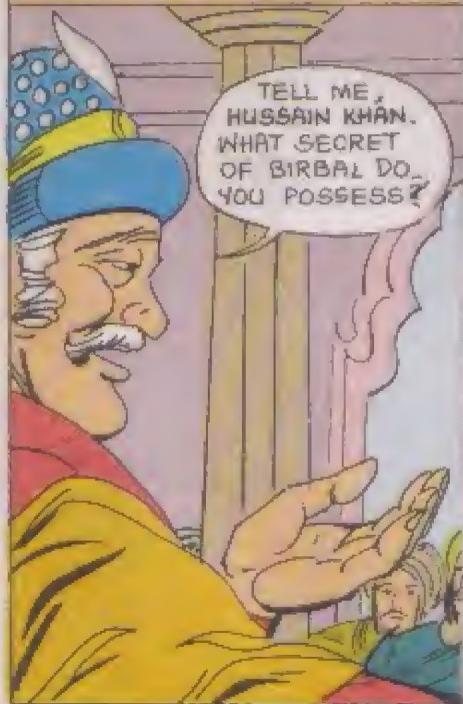
YOU ARE
LIKE THE
FULL MOON.
NO PHASE OF
THE MOON CAN
COMPARE WITH
IT FOR GLORY.

THE KING LOOKED PLEASED.
AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT,
HE ADDED —

AND WHAT OF YOUR
OWN KING? WHAT
DO YOU THINK
OF HIM?



BIRBAL RETURNED TO DELHI. BUT
NEWS OF HIS TRIP HAD REACHED
THERE. AT DIWAN-I-KHAS —



HE PRETENDS TO BE YOUR LOYAL AIDE. BUT WHEN HE WENT TO KABUL HE DECLARED IN THE COURT THERE THAT THE KING OF KABUL WAS LIKE A FULL MOON, WHILE YOU WERE JUST A CRESCENT MOON.

IS THAT SO? I WILL ASK HIM TOMORROW IN THE COURT.

SURE ENOUGH, NEXT DAY—

BIRBAL, I HAVE A SERIOUS CHARGE AGAINST YOU.

ME, JAHANPANAH? WHAT HAVE I DONE?

I HAVE COME TO KNOW THAT IN THE COURT OF KABUL, JUST TO FLATTER THE KING THERE, YOU MADE DemeANING REMARKS ABOUT ME.

THAT'S NOT TRUE!

TELL ME ON OATH, DID YOU NOT COMPARE ME TO A CRESCENT MOON, AND THE KING OF KABUL TO A FULL MOON?

THAT I DID, SIRE.

HOW DARE YOU, BIRBAL! YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE MY MOST LOYAL AIDE.

I DID MAKE THAT COMPARISON, SIRE. BUT DON'T YOU REALISE THAT THE FULL MOON IS DESTINED TO DECREASE IN GLORY AND SIZE?

IT IS THE CRESCENT MOON THAT IS FULL OF PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE. IT WILL GROW IN GLORY DAY BY DAY. DON'T THE MUSLIMS AND HINDUS VENERATE THE MOON OF THE SECOND LUNAR DAY?

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO SUSPECT YOU, AS USUAL, BIRBAL, YOU WIN.

VALUE OF WASTE

ONE DAY IN THE COURT—

SEE THIS EXCELLENT VASE!

NO, IT'S A LITTLE CHIPPED. NEVER SHOW ME ANYTHING BROKEN.

BIRBAL INTERVENED —

WHY, HUZOOR?

SURELY, BIRBAL, YOU KNOW THAT ANYTHING THAT IS BROKEN, CRUSHED OR ROTTEN IS OF NO USE TO ANYONE.

SOMETIMES MAYBE, BUT THAT IS NOT ALWAYS TRUE.

PROVE IT TO ME, BIRBAL.

THE JUICE WE GET FROM SUGARCANE BY BREAKING AND CRUSHING GIVES SUGAR, JAGGERY AND DELICIOUS SWEETS, FIT TO BE A DIVINE OFFERING.

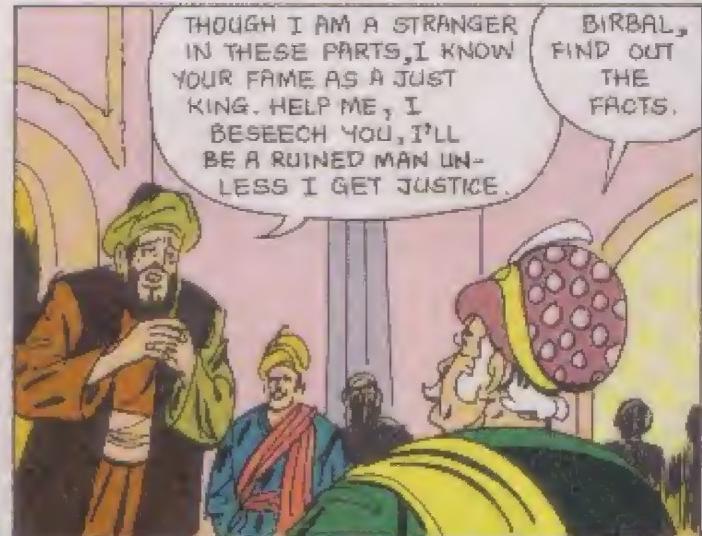
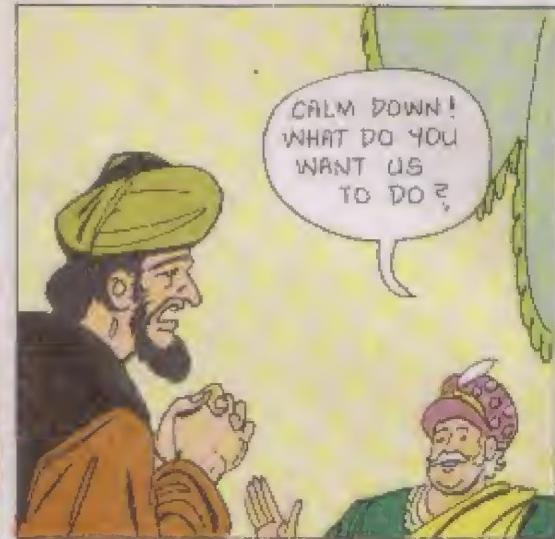
THE COTTON POD BURSTS FORTH TO YIELD THE COTTON STRING. CLOTHES MADE FROM ITS SPINNING AND WEAVING ARE FIT FOR EVEN A KING.

THE ROTTEN DECAYING RAGS, OLD JUTE AND OTHER WASTES YIELD PAPER FOR THE SACRED QURAN AS WELL AS OUR PURANAS.

INDEED THAT'S TRUE, BIRBAL. EVERYTHING HAS ITS USE, EVEN THE BROKEN, CRUSHED AND ROTTEN STUFF.

THE TRUE OWNER

ONE DAY AKBAR, BIRBAL AND THE OTHER COURTIERS WERE IN THE DIWAN-I-AM. SUDDENLY —



BIRBAL PAUSED FOR A WHILE.

WE'LL SETTLE THE MATTER HERE IN THE COURT TOMORROW.

AFTER THE COURT ADJOURNED, BIRBAL CHANGED HIS COURTIER'S CLOTHES TO THAT OF A MUNIM* AND WENT TO THE RIVERBANK WITH A FRIEND.

THERE, THE SECOND BOAT. HE IS THE MAN. LET'S GO.

AS PLANNED EARLIER, HIS FRIEND BEGAN TO NEGOTIATE.

WHAT GOODS HAVE YOU TO SELL?

OH! THE FINEST PERSIAN CARPETS.

ARE YOU PLANNING TO SELL YOUR THINGS HERE?

YES, IF POSSIBLE. I HAVE GOODS WORTH TEN THOUSAND RUPEES.

WELL, THE MARKET FOR CARPETS IS RATHER LOW IN DELHI THESE DAYS. SO, IF YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR STUFF, I'LL TAKE IT FOR FIVE THOUSAND.

FOR HALF THE PRICE?

THINK ABOUT IT AND LET ME KNOW.

WAIT! WAIT! I'LL SELL IT FOR FIVE THOUSAND.

THE TRADER NOW TURNED TO HIS MUNIM WHO WAS IN REALITY BIRBAL IN DISGUISE.

MUNIMJI, JUST CHECK THE GOODS FOR THEIR WORTH.

SHOW US SOME SAMPLES.

BIRBAL EXAMINED THE CARPETS CRITICALLY.

LET ME CHECK THE PILE AND THE DESIGN OF YOUR CARPETS. HMM, NOT VERY GOOD I'M AFRAID.

EVEN FIVE THOUSAND IS TOO MUCH FOR THESE INFERIOR QUALITY CARPETS.

YES, YOU ARE RIGHT. WE SHOULDN'T PAY MORE THAN THREE THOUSAND.

WELL, IF THAT'S THE MAXIMUM YOU ARE READY TO PAY, I'LL HAVE TO ACCEPT IT.

AGREED. WE'LL COME TOMORROW TO COLLECT THE GOODS AND PAY THE MONEY.

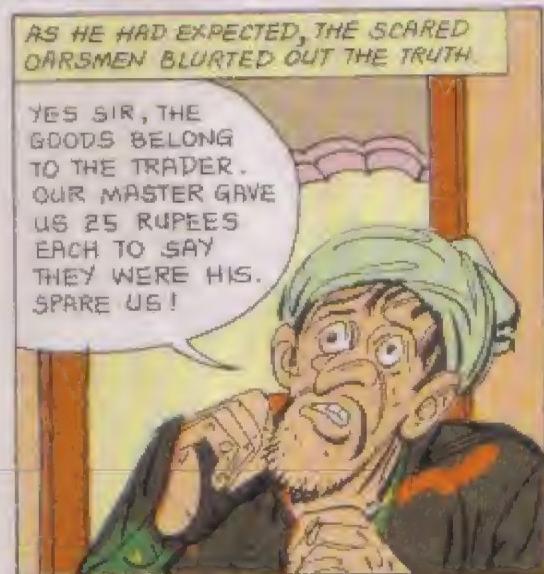
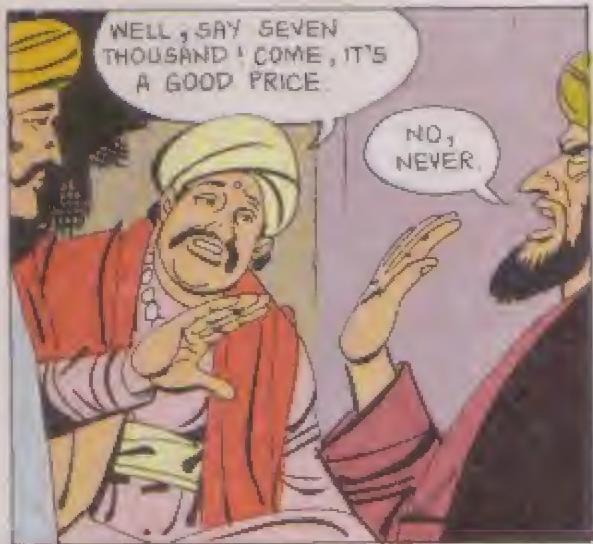
NOW THE TWO WENT TO THE INN WHERE THE TRADER WAS STAYING.

I HEARD YOU HAVE BROUGHT GOODS WORTH 10,000 FOR SALE.

THEY ARE THE FINEST OF CARPETS.

WELL, THE DEMAND FOR CARPETS IS RATHER LOW. WILL YOU SELL FOR FIVE THOUSAND?

WHAAAT?!

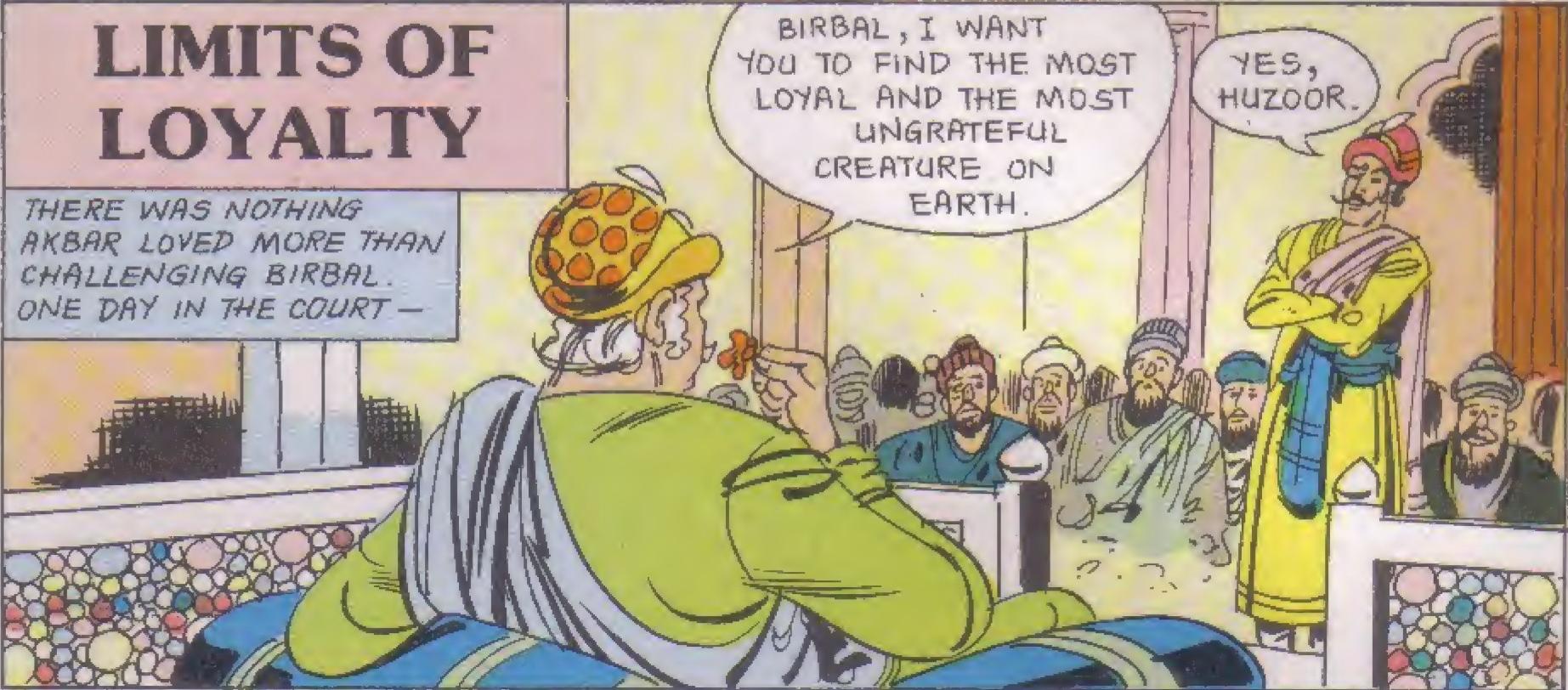


LIMITS OF LOYALTY

THERE WAS NOTHING AKBAR LOVED MORE THAN CHALLENGING BIRBAL. ONE DAY IN THE COURT —

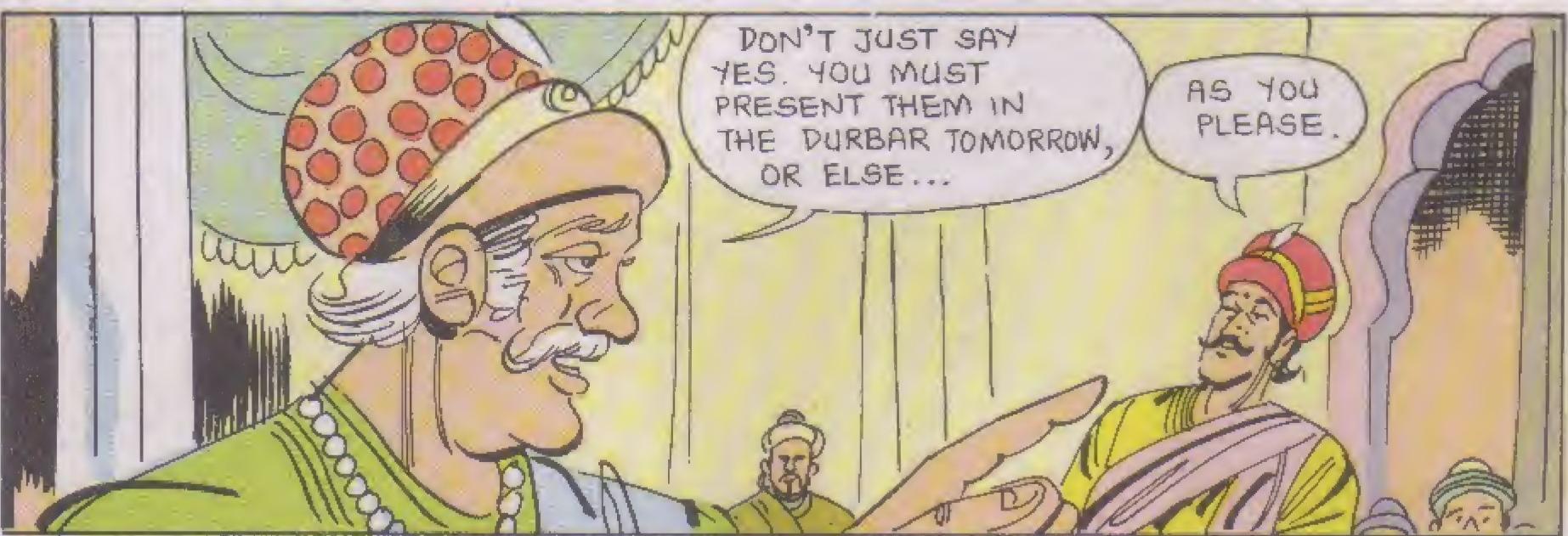
BIRBAL, I WANT YOU TO FIND THE MOST LOYAL AND THE MOST UNGRATEFUL CREATURE ON EARTH.

YES, HUZOOR.



DON'T JUST SAY YES. YOU MUST PRESENT THEM IN THE DURBAR TOMORROW, OR ELSE...

AS YOU PLEASE.



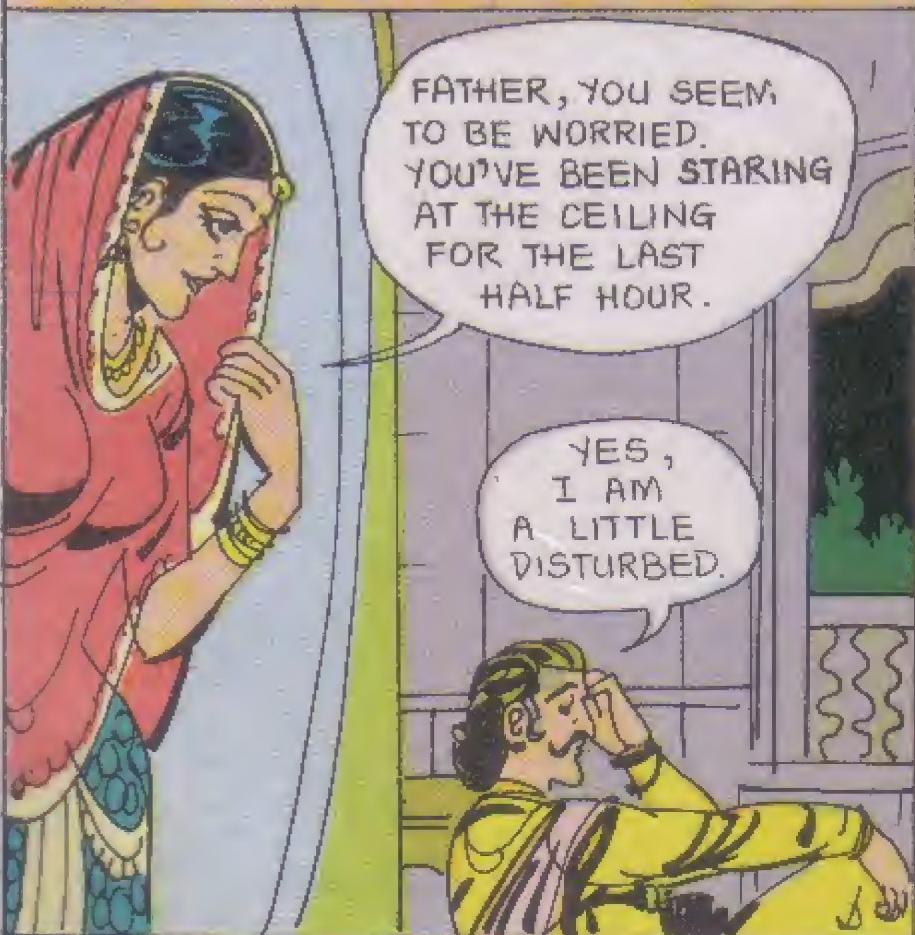
BIRBAL AGREED TO DO AS ASKED. BUT ON GOING HOME, HIS DAUGHTER SAID —

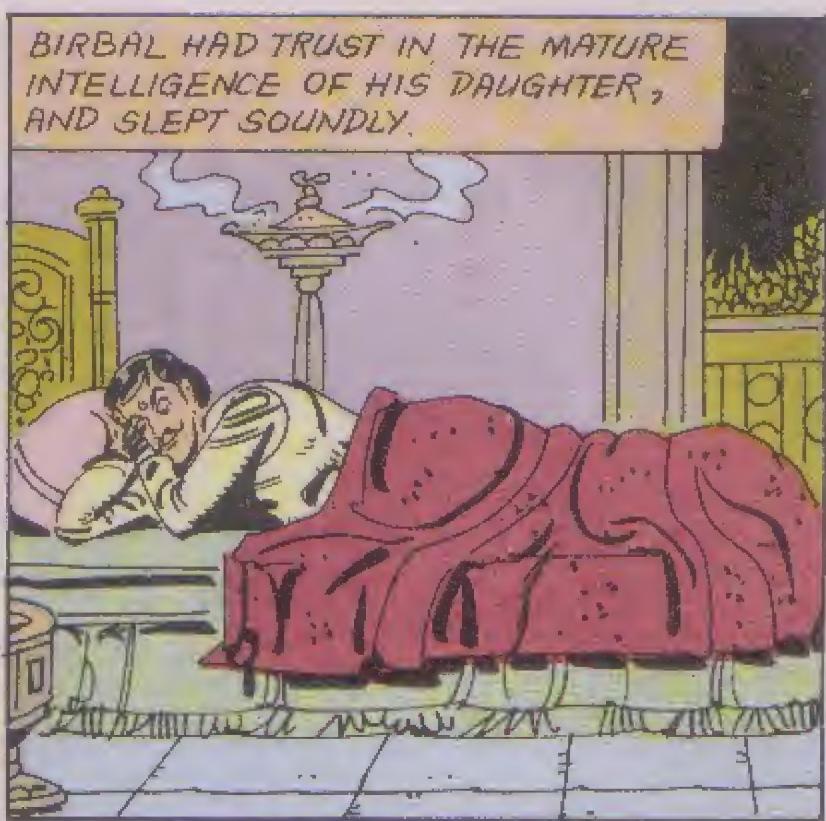
FATHER, YOU SEEM TO BE WORRIED. YOU'VE BEEN STARING AT THE CEILING FOR THE LAST HALF HOUR.

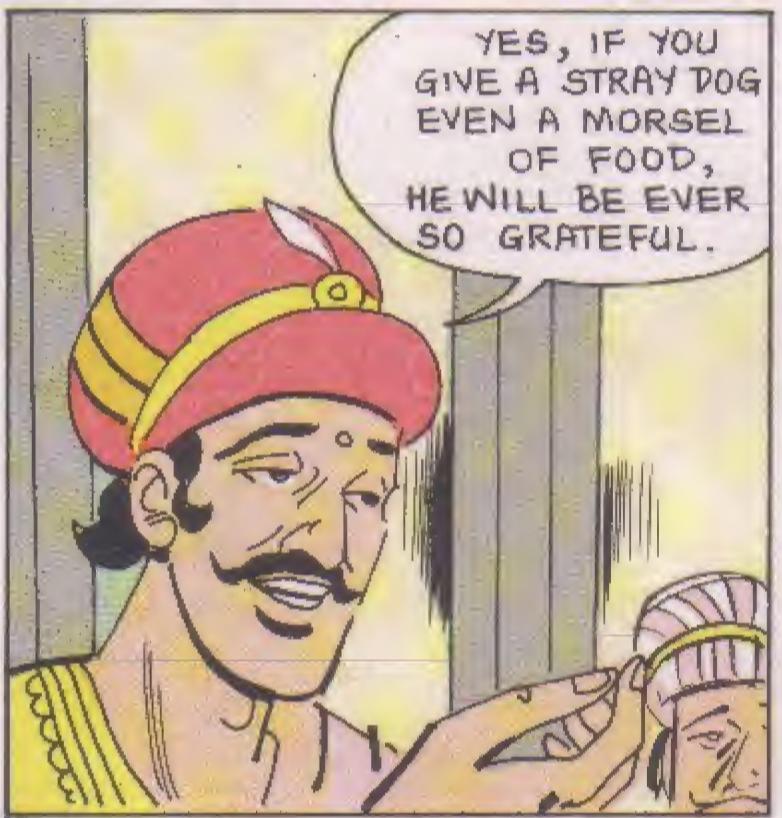
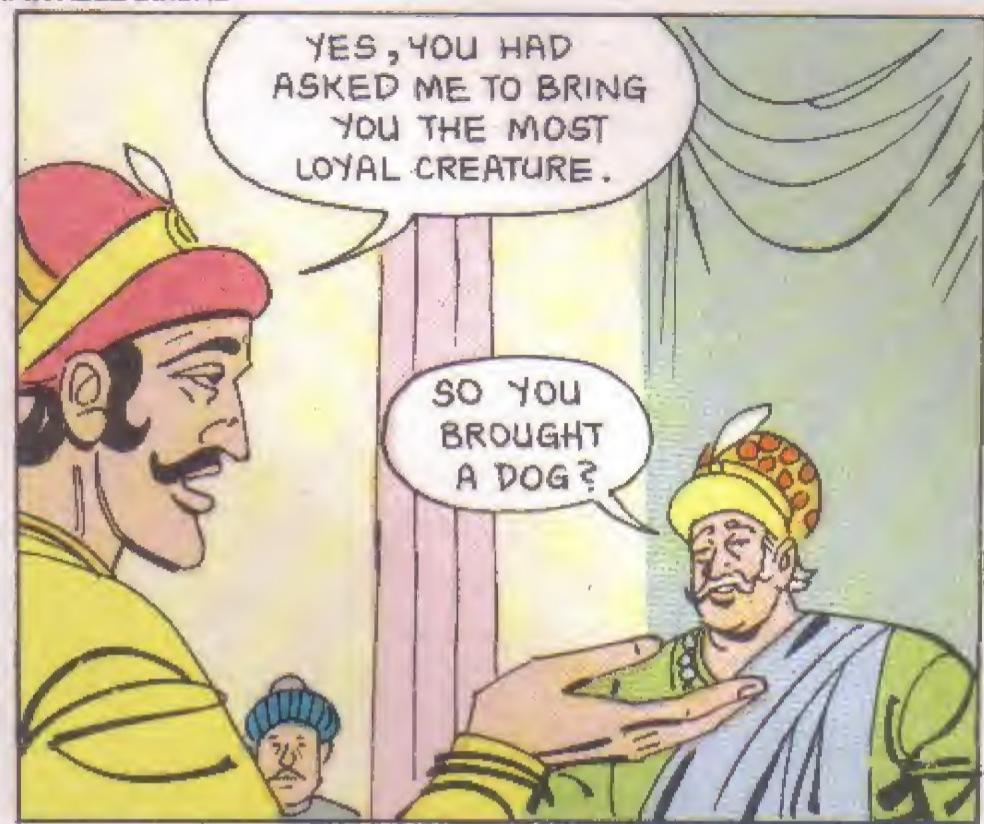
YES, I AM A LITTLE DISTURBED.

IS IT A PROBLEM POSED BY THE EMPEROR?

YES, HE WANTS ME TO BRING HIM THE MOST LOYAL AND THE MOST UNGRATEFUL CREATURE BY TOMORROW MORNING.







BUT WE
MUST THEN
REWARD THE
DOG AND
PUNISH THE
SON-IN-LAW.

LET THE DOG BE
FED SUMPTUOUSLY.
AS FOR THE SON-IN-
LAW, LET HIM BE
HANGED.

BUT...
BUT...
HUZOOR.

NO BUTS, BIRBAL. I
BELIEVE IN
JUSTICE.

BUT HE
IS ONLY A
SPECIMEN, ONLY
A REPRESENTATIVE
OF ALL
SONS-IN-LAW.

IF YOU DECIDE
TO AWARD A
PUNISHMENT, ALL
OF THEM MUST
BE HANGED.

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?

... INCLUDING ME AND
YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS.
EVERYONE OF US IS
SOMEBODY'S
SON-IN-LAW.

I MEAN,
YOU WILL
HAVE TO HANG
ALL
SONS-IN-LAW...

IN THAT
CASE, LET
HIM GO!

AND OFF IT FLEW

AKBAR WAS FOND OF STORIES. HE COULD NOT SLEEP UNLESS HE LISTENED TO A NEW TALE EVERY NIGHT.



ONE EVENING, IT WAS BIRBAL'S TURN. BIRBAL WOULD SPIN A LONG YARN EACH TIME HE PAUSED FOR BREATH —

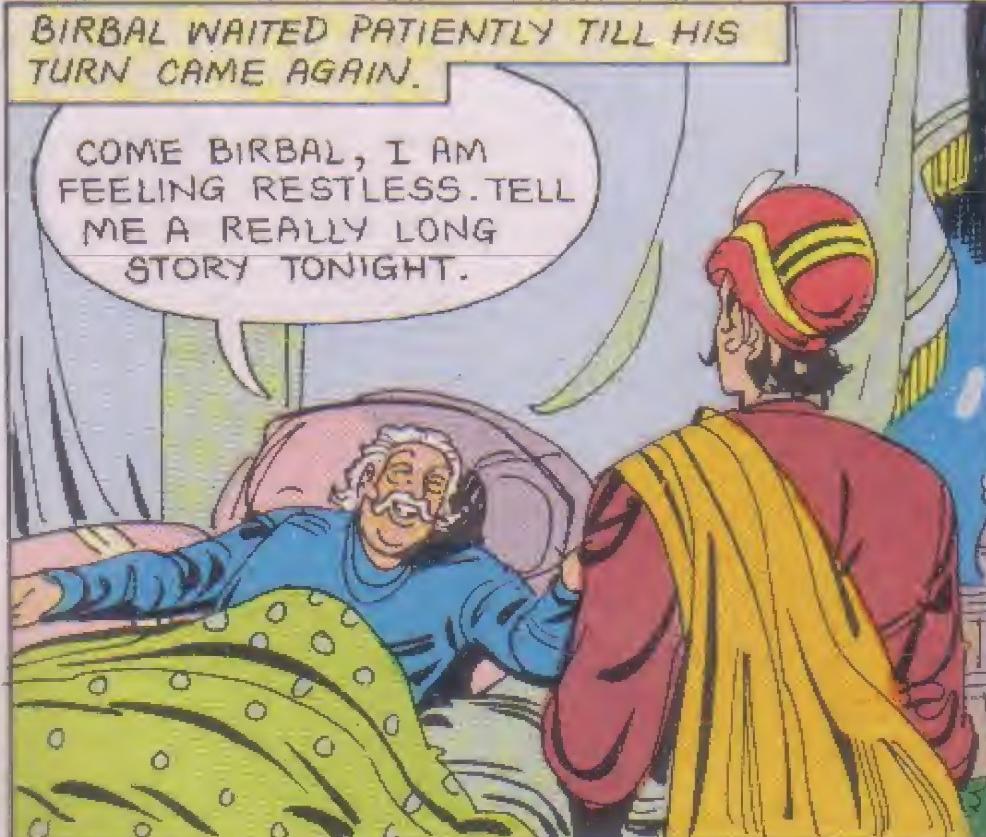
AND THEN?

ALL HE HAS TO SAY IS 'AND THEN?' IT'S MY POOR JAW THAT GETS WEARY TALKING.



BIRBAL WAITED PATIENTLY TILL HIS TURN CAME AGAIN.

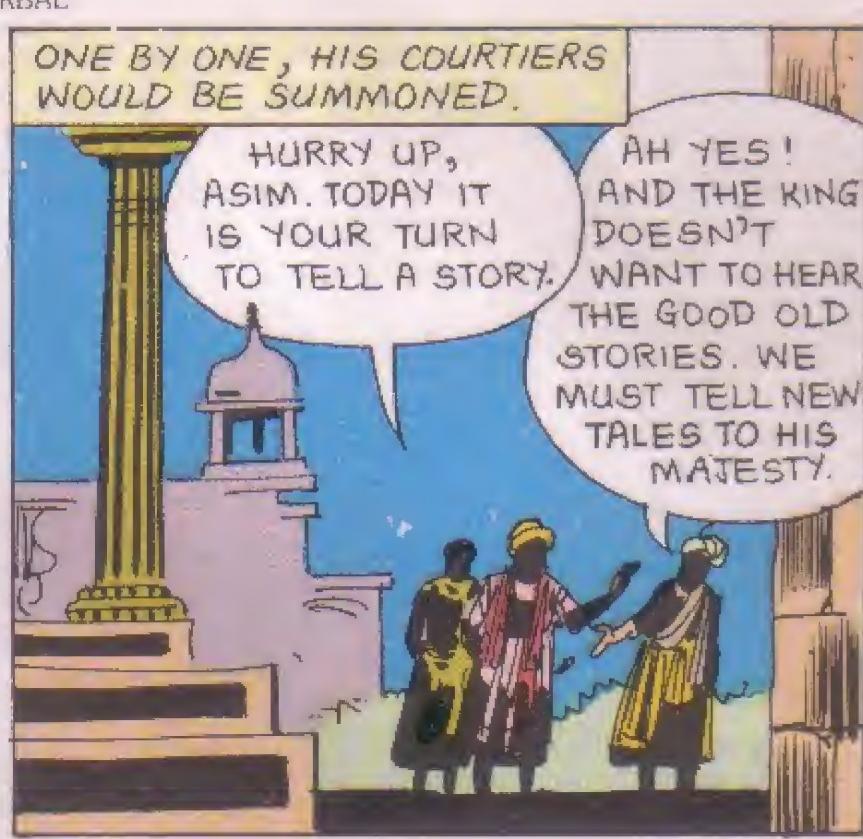
COME BIRBAL, I AM FEELING RESTLESS. TELL ME A REALLY LONG STORY TONIGHT.



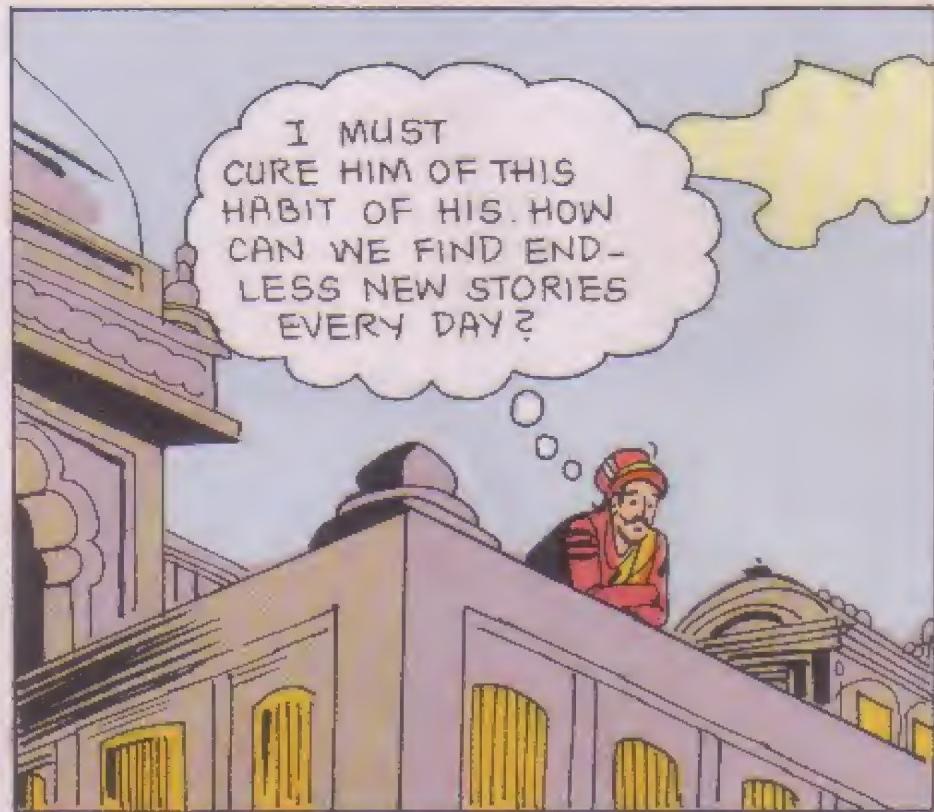
ONE BY ONE, HIS COURTIERS WOULD BE SUMMONED.

HURRY UP, ASIM. TODAY IT IS YOUR TURN TO TELL A STORY.

AH YES! AND THE KING DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR THE GOOD OLD STORIES. WE MUST TELL NEW TALES TO HIS MAJESTY.

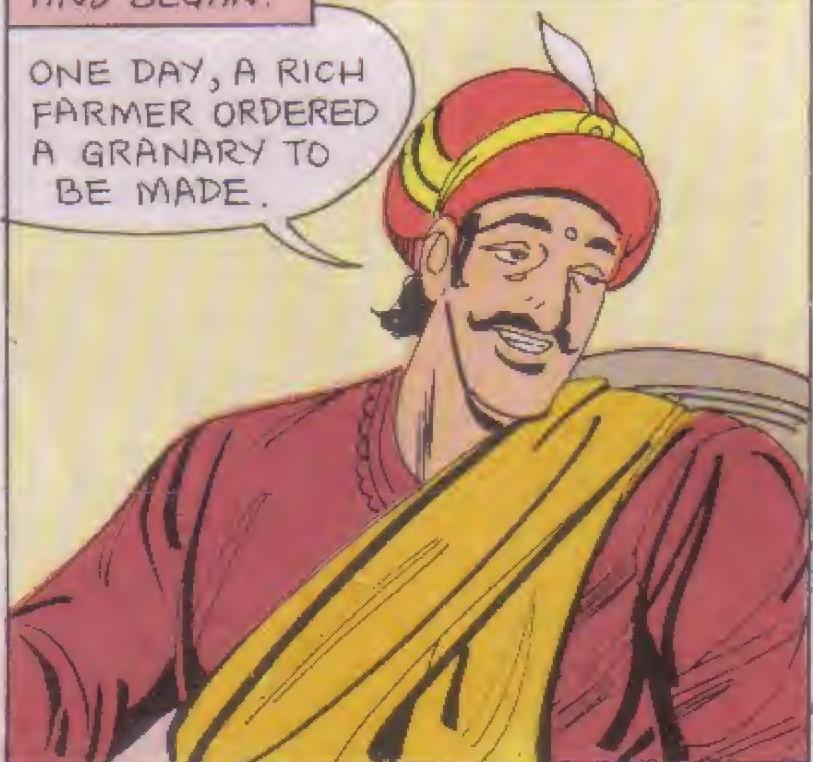


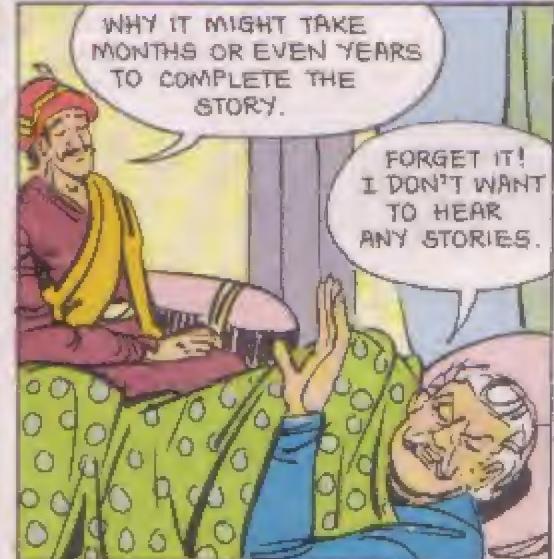
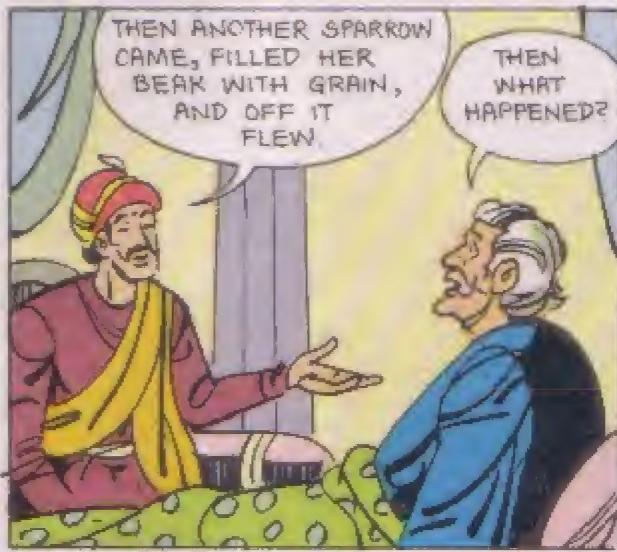
I MUST CURE HIM OF THIS HABIT OF HIS. HOW CAN WE FIND ENDLESS NEW STORIES EVERY DAY?



BIRBAL SETTLED DOWN COMFORTABLY AND BEGAN.

ONE DAY, A RICH FARMER ORDERED A GRANARY TO BE MADE.



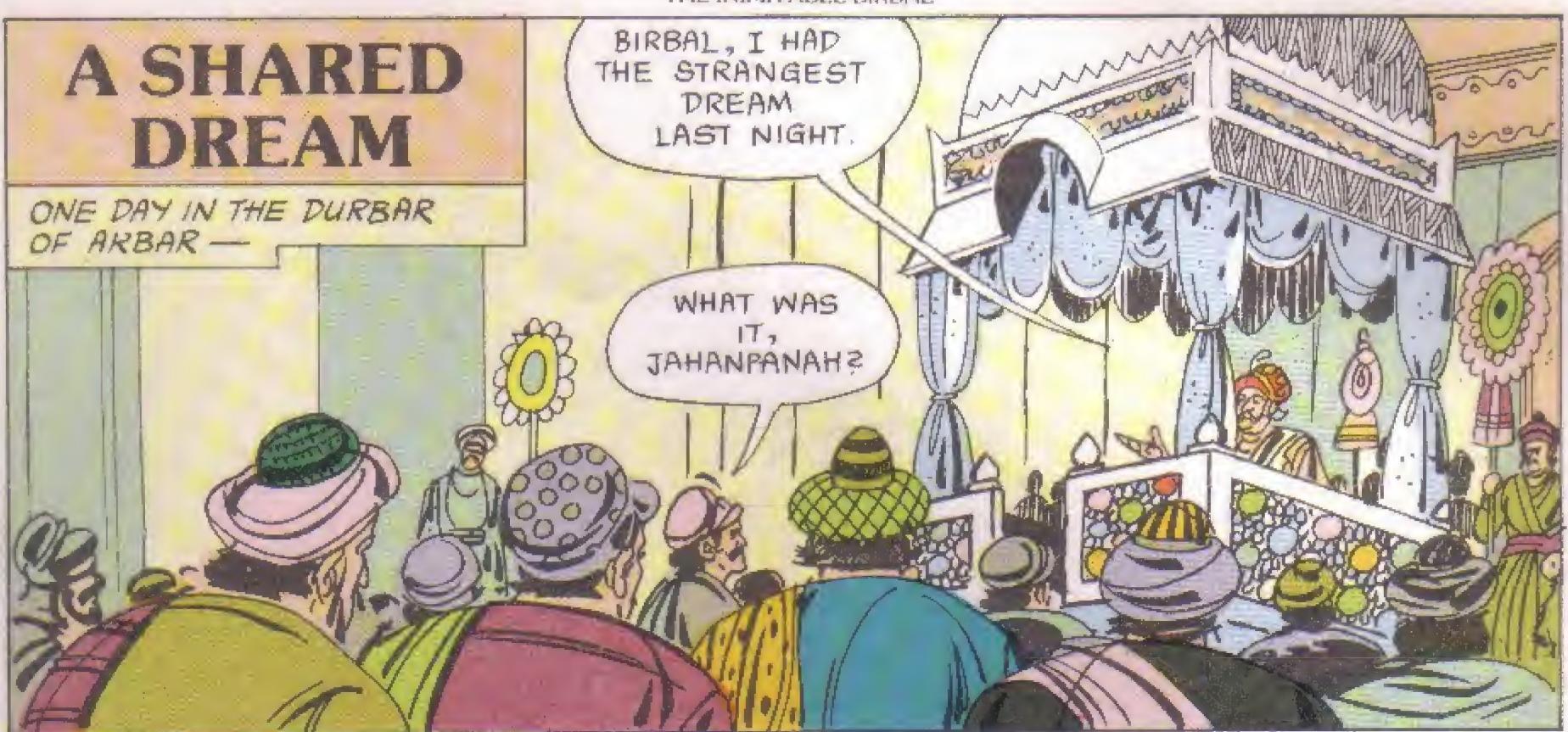


A SHARED DREAM

ONE DAY IN THE DURBAR OF AKBAR —

BIRBAL, I HAD THE STRANGEST DREAM LAST NIGHT.

WHAT WAS IT, JAHANPNAH?



WE WERE BOTH FLOATING IN THE SKY LIKE CLOUDS.

THEN SUDDENLY WE BOTH FELL DOWN WITH A BANG.



I FELL INTO A BIG PIT FILLED WITH HONEY.

BUT YOU, BIRBAL, FELL INTO A GUTTER.

HUH!



